



Bel Canto: A Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method (Dover Books on Music)

Mathilde Marchesi

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Mathilde Marchesi (1821–1913) was probably the most renowned singing teacher of the late nineteenth century. Herself the pupil of the great Manuel Garcia the Second and the associate of the unsurpassable divas of the middle nineteenth century, she also linked the traditional bel canto teaching method to the beginning of the twentieth century. Early in her career her work was praised enthusiastically by Rossini, who was for a time officially in charge of voice training in France; and toward the end of her career she prepared such superstars as Melba, Calvé, Eames, Aida, and others.

This volume embodies Madame Marchesi's "vocal alphabet," or basic instructions and exercises that formed the voices of her great pupils. An introductory text discusses breathing, attack, registers, and similar matters, while the remainder of the book contains many exercises that teach voice management and projections.

Marchesi's book is today even more important than when it first appeared, for it offers the basis for a construction of the bel canto training system. At the time the book appeared, the bel canto system had gone out of fashion in favor of more modern schools that seemed to offer more rapid maturation, voice volume, and dramatics. Today, a more realistic reevaluation has revealed that the bel canto system gave the singer much longer performing life, a more pleasing voice, and far greater musical ability. As Philip Miller states in his introduction, "a solidity, a sure technical mastery, an even scale with no register break . . . strong, even and secure trills, their coloratura masterly." In addition, the resurgence of interest in early-nineteenth-century opera renders a work like Marchesi's indispensable to the modern singer.

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